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The Washington Times

www.washingtontimes.com

McNair touts technology

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Published June 4, 2005

Modern Army soldiers are not the men and women of Vietnam or other previous wars. They are better equipped, more highly trained and ready to combat terrorism and urban warfare, officials at a celebration for the Army's 230th anniversary said yesterday.

At Fort McNair in Southwest, some of the advanced technology and equipment -- including a remote-control bomb-defusing robot -- was showcased.

Robotic technology is "the wave of the future" for combating explosives, said Capt. Chris Bartos of the 744th Ordnance Company, Explosive Ordnance Disposal. The unit is responsible for the disarming and disposal of hazardous explosives such as biological, chemical and nuclear ordnance as well as criminal or terrorist devices.

"In the past, [explosive ordnance disposal] was more hands-on and manual," Capt. Bartos said. "We would have to send someone in wearing a bomb suit, like in the movies. We would call that 'the longest walk.' "

The robot is a "huge improvement" for safety, allowing the disarming of explosives without putting any soldiers in danger, he said.

Capt. Bartos said the modern soldier can identify with the newer equipment because of the remote-control similarities to video games.

"This .50-caliber sniper rifle that we had here today, you can find it on many video games. The technology appeals to the younger" generations because of the familiarity, he said.

Vehicle armor also was profiled. An armor survivability kit -- developed by the Army's Research, Development and Engineering Command and the Tank-Automotive Research, Development and Engineering Center -- enables vehicles to withstand small-arms fire and hits from rocket-propelled grenades.

"Most tactical vehicles now have some level of armor," said Steve C. Taulbee, an engineer at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

Nearly 13,000 vehicles have been outfitted with the armor, which costs about \$10,000, Mr. Taulbee said.

The rapidly advancing technology of the Army has kept it ahead of the enemy, Capt. Bartos said. "By the time they come up with something, we've come up with something to counter it," he said.

But Maj. Gen. Kenneth J. Quinlan Jr., commandant of the Joint Forces Staff College, said the Army also gets its strength from the "leadership, experience, education and training" of soldiers.

He said soldiers now have a "warrior ethos" and a sense of duty to protect a freedom that U.S. citizens have "by accident of birth."

"Young Americans want to be challenged, they want to see the world, and they want to know they're making a difference," Gen. Quinlan said.

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